

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL  
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY  
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**THE WORKING PEOPLE OF LOWELL  
LOWELL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK  
MARY BLEWETT/MARTHA MAYO**

**INFORMANT: ANITA WILCOX LELACHEUR  
INTERVIEWER: SYLVIA CONTOVER  
DATE: OCTOBER 22, 1985**

**S = SYLVIA  
A = ANITA**

**Tape 85.18**

S: Okay, we should try it at twelve then shouldn't we? Isn't that where we said? We should start talking at twelve?

Male voice: Well yah, all right. That's what it was before, right?

S: Yah.

Male: It's recording now, so.

S: Oh, it's recording? So we are all set to start then. All right. This is...the date is October 22, 1985. I'm Sylvia Contover and I'm interviewing Anita LeLacheur in her home, and she'll be the narrator for this interview. And why don't we start with your grandparents, Anita.

A: My father's father was Daniel Webster Wilcox, and he was born in Wilmington, Massachusetts in 1858.

S: So who came to this country then? How far back?

A: His ancestors came in the sixteen-hundreds.

S: I see, umhm.

A: As far as I know. It was looked into by my cousin in New Jersey. (S: yes) My grandmother was born in Wisconsin in 1858. And I know in listening to stories that she told, she somehow got to New York State and then in some mysterious way got here to Lowell. I don't know how they met or anything. Being the paternal grandparents, I don't think I discussed. Well they...my

grandfather died when I was two and my grandmother told me a few things, but she was not that outgoing to talk about her childhood, so, with me.

S: But you kept up the Irish tradition?

A: Well no. That was, that... My grandmother's maiden name was Morris and my grandfather was English, on my father's side. (S: I see) My mother's side both of her parents were born in Clare, County Clare, Ireland. They came at different times to this country, didn't know each other in Ireland. And he, as a gay blade of the Irish blood, used to go to Sunday Church Services, Sunday night so that the Irish boys would stand outside church and see all the Irish house girls, which is what my grandmother was. And he kind of liked what he saw, and struck up a conversation with her, and they began to court. And then her sister was living here in Lowell and she came for a visit. And as I understand it my grandfather came shortly thereafter. (S: Oh I see) And they went back to Illinois and were married in Illinois and then they came back to Lowell and set up housekeeping. And it evolved that my mother, I mean my grandmother and her sister and her brother all lived in Lowell, and all migrated to Lowell. So that I know a great deal more of my mothers side of the family, because even though I was an only child, my aunts and uncles, my mother was one of six and she was the baby. And they all came to our house, and therefore I heard all these stories and everything. And now (----)

S: Now did they come to Lowell because of the mills, to work here because there were jobs?

A: It was supposed to be a prosperous place. My grandmother did not work. She stayed home with the six children. My grandfather was a conductor on the streetcars. And one of my uncles worked originally, was the manager of a cigar store downtown. And then he opened his own Florist Shop. One of the boys became a police officer. One became a printer, and one of the girls worked in the Shoe Shop. And one of the other, my oldest aunt lived, second oldest I should say, worked in the Telephone Company, and then she was married. Of course in those days if a woman married they did no longer work. And even thinking back to child, of all the women in our neighborhood, the only, the ones that stayed home were the married ones. The single ladies worked in the mills, and the box factory, and the men worked in the American Hide and Leather and all that.

S: Where was your neighborhood?

A: I grew up in what they called the South End. (S: uh huh) Upper Central Street, Hosford Square. And at that time my mother tells me when she first moved there that it was considered quite a nice neighborhood. That Doctor McCarty lived there, and he had his horses and his wagon. And then there was a beautiful home called he O'Leary Home, which was an orphanage. And it was a working class neighborhood. You had you know, policemen. You had the man that ran a bakery. You had men that worked in the Bunting, which is a mill down on Crosby Street. And there were many rooming houses in that area.

S: Oh, were there?

A: People, it was funny, because as a child I remember, we got out of school at quarter past eleven, eleven-thirty, somewhere in there. And we'd go home for lunch and then come back for quarter past one. And you better not be in their way. When that Mill whistle blew, they just went in all directions to these rooming houses where they were served hot meals.

S: No who were in the rooming houses? Bachelors?

A: Bachelors and maiden ladies.

S: And maiden ladies, also?

A: Some were restricted. Some were strictly bachelors. (S: I see) But when it came to meal time, they had an arrangement whereby they probably paid like twenty-five cents a day for a hot meal that included soup and hot bread. And my mother lived in a three decker house on Mead Street, which was down off Whipple Street, which was very close to a lot of these mills. And she used to come home from school for her lunch and help out a lady who set up tables in her living room, tables in her dining room and tables in her kitchen, and fed all of these people. (S: I see) And mother said it was fun, because she used to get like twenty-five cents a day for doing it. But it was funny, because she said it was like a stampede coming up the stairs because the lady lived on the middle floor and you'd hear this stampede. And I remember in later years, going to this same lady's house to visit, and she used to give me home made picallili and home made mustard, which they called the chow-chow.

S: Now why was it a stampede? (A: People would..) Was it because they had limited time for their lunch?

A: Yes, they only had, they had that hour. And the same way the whistle blew again at one o'clock, and they had to be there. Of course, she had hot... Well in those days they had the Cartridge Shop, was in, was going, and you had the Bunting, and you had you know, American Woolen. There were so many mills, and not in that particular neighborhood. There were quite a few, but people would come for their meal. And then at night they had a little hot, some sort of a hot plate in their room, or they'd just have a cold sandwich.

S: Now in these boarding houses, were they rooming houses? (A: Umhm) They were rooming and boarding, right, because they... Was it ethnic groups that were there, or was it mixed groups?

A: I, I would say in that particular, in my neighborhood, the majority of the people that I knew, that came for meals were of the Irish extraction. I don't, you know... There may have been these things for Portuguese people. The whole neighborhood was mainly Italian, Portuguese, Polish, Lithuanian and Irish. I can't recall any French family living in the neighborhood, or German, or anything like that.

S: I wondered if they each had their own rooming houses.

A: That I don't know, but I mean the ones that I'm thinking of, like Mrs. Hornbrooks, I would say was primarily Irish. I can think of the names of some of the people who lived there. And then Donahues, there was Donahue's, and Mrs. McGlinchy had one. It was just, it was just a fun thing to see these people come, you know, come running. They had their aprons on. Some would take the aprons off, but they could tear down, up Back Central Street, coming up Whipple Street or coming up Crosby Street, and then down Central Street to Hosford Square, where there were three that I knew of in that general neighborhood. Now there may have been others on other streets, but those are the ones I knew.

S: Well they didn't take...in those days they didn't take meals to their work?

A: No, and of course there weren't any cafeterias in the mills or anything. They...there may have been people who carried their lunches, but the people who lived in these rooming houses would come home for lunch.

S: Evidently they were close enough so they could come home.

A: Yes, yes, definitely.

S: That's interesting. Did these people who roomed there all get along together?

A: I would assume so, because I never saw the "Black Maria" as we called it in those days. I never saw any indication that there was trouble. We never saw any sign of drunkenness, or anything like that. I can remember that as a child. Then later on, when the mills began closing, and then you ran into prohibition, at that time you would see a great deal of drunkenness. It was sad, you know, and then you'd see [unclear]. For instance, a couple come down the street, older people, and you were always very sure that you stayed away from them, because invariably they would be arguing. And then the argument would carry over into the house. And then usually someone, either one or two of them would end up getting arrested.

S: Oh you mean they'd both be drinking, or one?

A: Yes, yes, yup. (S: Oh I see) It was... there were a lot of kitchen, kitchen barrooms they called them in those days. They couldn't drink publicly so they drank at home.

S: Was there bootlegging in those days?

A: Yes, oh yes. Oh yes!

S: There was a lot of bootlegging?

A: Oh yes. Oh yes. Definitely.

S: So these were the kitchen barrooms that you'd call them?

A: There was Ben's Court for instance was one spot that was well known. It was down off lower Gorham Street.

S: Well that's good to know.

A: It was, you know, it was just something you saw. Of course men were out of work. It was depression time, and you'd see one, they'd probably would pool their money and one would come in down, maybe four or five would come down the street, usually from the South Common, which was usually where they met, and they would come down the street and again, they didn't bother you and you didn't bother them. It was during the day. And I mean you never worried about going out on the street in that neighborhood at night. Never. There was never... You left your doors open and everything. They would stop at the mail box at the corner of Elm and Back Central Street. We lived on the corner, and we lived on the third floor. So therefore I had a beautiful view of what was going on in the overall neighborhood. And they would go to the nearby stores and buy a bottle of rubbing alcohol.

S: Oh really?

A: And then you'd see them, you know, each one passing the bottle. It was sad, but the men (--)

S: They were desperate.

A: They were desperate. They didn't have homes. They didn't have any money and that was the only way they could get alcohol.

S: These were the people that lived in that neighborhood?

A: Yes. They were the ones, some of them had been discarded by their family. (S: I see) And I can remember my grandmother telling me the story, not this has anything to do with the liquor problem, but I can remember my grandmother telling me that, my father's mother, where they had so many boys in their family, that she never knew how many were coming down for breakfast, because if one of the boys didn't make it home for his curfew, which may have been ten o'clock, eleven o'clock, whatever, then they couldn't get in because they'd be locked out. And I mean, it was, it's now what they're calling tough love. They think it's something new, but in that era, that was something that was there from day one. They didn't pamper the children. They had to have respect, and in order to get respect, there were rules. And my grandmother told me that if one of the boys had a friend, and the friend was not able to get into his house because of some reason on another, then the boys, meaning her boys, would bring them home. At breakfast, in the morning, she may have five boys and she may have ten boys, depending on who brought who home and how many.

S: Uh huh.

A: And she was always willing to, and my grandfather was the same way, you know. But it was a very ethnic neighborhood, but it was a neighborhood where we all played together. We didn't call each other names. Some people I never knew by their last name. I knew they didn't go to

the school I went to, which was primarily Irish and Italian, because the Portuguese children who lived in the neighborhood had their own church. St Anthony's Church at that time was just a basement, and eventually built this beautiful...

S: Did they have a school?

A: No.

S: Did they have parochial school?

A: No they didn't.

S: Where did they go to school?

A: They went to public. (S: Public School.) They went to the Coburn. They went to the Butler, the Ames Street, Coburn, and I imagine in the years way back, they went to the original Edson School, which is now where the Rogers School is. But when I was a child that was the Edson School. My parents went there as children. And I remember as a child, the lady who owned the house I lived in worked as an art teacher for the Lowell School Department. And she made all these little individual birthday cakes, as favors, out of construction paper with candles and all this. And this was to be used, and they had a party in the Memorial Auditorium. And if I'm not mistaken, it was to be celebrate like the seventy-fifth birthday of the Edson School. Now that was back when I was probably only oh, six, seven years old. So then eventually it as torn down, and then eventually it was replaced with the Rogers School.

S: Where did you go to school?

A: I went to St. Peter's School.

S: Were there many people in that school?

A: Oh yes. It was large. We had, we probably had thirty-nine to forty. Anywhere from thirty-five to forty students in each class. And you had a class, you know, of first grade girls and you had a class of first grade boys. We were not coed. We were separated. And there wasn't a kindergarten in those days. There was a public school kindergarten but I didn't go. I began St. Peter's School when I was, well, I was one month short of being six years old.

S: Was it nuns teaching?

A: Yes, all nuns, completely nuns. And if you were kept after school for any reason, the nuns in those days were not allowed to walk on the street alone. So you not only were kept after school but also had to walk the nun back to the convent. So you had double duty. You know, it took twice as much time. But we used to consider it an honor to walk with the nuns. But they always walked in twos. You never saw a nun without another nun or a child. And when I went to St. Peter's School, St. Peter's Convent, at that time, were the last two buildings on Highland Street opposite Keith Academy. And the two buildings, which one was the Tsongas House and I don't

know the other houses now, the O'Conner House. They were joined with like a, well, almost like an enclosed porch with lattice work, and you could stand there in the common and you could see these shadows going back and forth. And you could look up and see the nuns up in the windows, looking for the daylight, and they'd be doing their needlework and everything. And then there was, at the end of Highland Street, down next to McDonough's Funeral Home, that was just a field. And then eventually they built the beautiful building that's there now, that is now empty. And the school is now empty, which is a shame.

S: Yah, that's a shame.

A: And the church was at...When I was growing up St. Peter's Church was one of the most beautiful churches in the city. Absolutely beautiful! We had a pastor who was a Doctor and instead of calling him Father Kelleher, he was Dr. Daniel Kelleher.

S: Was that a medical Doctor?

A: No no, he was a doctor of (S: Philosophy?) Theology. (S: Theology) And then he became a Monsignor. And we had five, there were five curates, the Monsignor, and he was just, he was, well, to me he was like a Prince. He wore these little nose, pinch-nose glasses that didn't have ear pieces. I remember, as a child, he died, we were all taken, all the school children were taken in to see his body lying in state, in the Rectory. It was the first time I'd ever seen a body with eyeglasses on. But then I realized afterwards, he wouldn't have looked like Monsignor Kelleher. We used to love to see him come into the school, because we knew that was a day off with ice cream or whatever, you know. You know, he was... And then we also had a St. Peter's Camp, where you could go for a week for like five dollars. It was a very large, it was a large parish, but once urban renewal came in that parish was practically demolished.

S: Now were the people that belonged to the parish very close?

A: Very close. We had bazaars, a reunion every year that was in Memorial Auditorium and the nuns would start us doing routines way back in September. And we'd practiced, and practiced, and went to the auditorium for dress rehearsals. And every child in that school was in that reunion.

S: Now did any of the people who didn't come to that school, say from the public school, did they ever come to these affairs?

A: Oh yes. Oh yes. The nuns would take the children who went to the Butler School, but who went to our church, and they came to our church, or our school, for Sunday School. And then the nuns from St. Peter's also went out to my husband's church, which was not, in North Billerica, St. Andrews Church. And it's strange because it's only within the last few weeks that I ever realized that the nuns that he had for Sunday School were the nuns from St. Peter's. I had always assumed that the closest parish was Saint, the Sacred Heart, and that parish went to East Chelmsford. And I assumed that, you know, East Chelmsford to North Billerica was a hop, skip and a jump.

S: Now it was just the Catholic kids that belonged to your parish, outside of the Billerica kids coming in, were other kids, not necessarily Irish kids, like the Portuguese kids who were Catholic, did they come?

A: No. They went to the Portuguese Church, but they could come to anything we had the same way that the Portuguese people always had bazaars and they had Bingos, and it would be outdoors in the summer. We used to go down, a friend of mine lived, her back yard was just a fence separating it from the grounds of St. Anthony's Church and we would keep looking over the fence. But we would go in and get our hot dogs for five cents, tonic for five cents.

S: Well why did you look over the fence rather than going in?

A: Well we didn't have money to go. It was a week. The bazaar ran for a week.

S: I see.

A: And we didn't have money every night. You know, a nickel to a child in those days was a great deal. You could get ice cream for, a huge ice cream cone for a nickel, a hot dog, bag of chips, bag of peanuts.

S: Did the kids from different ethnic groups go to visit each others' house?

A: Oh yes.

S: They did?

A: Oh yes. I lived...

S: There was no tension then?

A: No, absolutely none. No. You never heard derogatory things and we never called each other names. You'd hear, for instance, I had thirty-six curls. I had a head full of curls. And I used to, when my name was Anita, I used to get called Uneeda Biscuits, which I despised. And of course, I would go screeching after whoever had called it to me. And I never

S: Would that be kids from your own school that would call you that?

A: Yes, or kids in the neighborhood. Some went to the Butler School, some went to the Coburn, some went to the Lithuanian uh, um (S: Portuguese?) no, it was the Polish School oven on High Street. Can't think of the name.

S: Casimer's?

A: No, I think it's the Holy, Holy something. I can't think of it. I wish I could. St. Joeseph's was the Lithuanian Church on Rogers Street. They didn't have a school. So they went to Public School. But we all mixed. We had little names and there were nicknames for different kiddos,



you know, they had crazy names that nobody really understood. It was sort of, if you were best friends with that person, you might have a name for them that you, only you, called them. But if someone else called them that, then you would be in, there'd be a fight! I mean it was pretty evident. Being a girl I wasn't into fighting, but you know, I did see some girls who would get into hair pulling, and scratching, but I suppose that's true of...

S: Did the boys have gangs then?

A: No.

S: They didn't? (A: No, ah) They didn't fight each other from the other schools, you know, with snowballs?

A: Not that I was aware of. Well snowballs, yes. Yes they did do that. They would lie in waiting for the... We, in parochial school, got out a little bit earlier than the public school and I'm sure that there was some of that going on. I can remember getting out of school and coming up, home and we discovered this little hill. And by being able to put down cardboard or something, we could use it as a sled. Well I discovered that I could do a much better job by going down on my school bag. Now my school bag had cost probably a grand total of a dollar twenty-nine, but it was supposed to last me for eight years. That was the original theory. And one day my mother wondered why it was getting so scratched and looking terrible. And so she decided that she would walk to school to see what I was doing. And she saw, and I got, I flew home that day to put it bluntly with my mother's hand on my elbow. I should say, I got ushered, as she said, ushered home. I was punished and I did not ride my school bag any more. But there were snowballs I know, and ah...

S: Tell me about when your mother and your father got married?

A: Well my mother and father met when they were quite young. My mother was two years older than my father. And they were engaged for probably seven years, because my mother had given up her second, she left school in her second year of high school, because her mother was a semi-invalid. And even though my mother worked she did not want to get married, because she did not think it was fair to my grandmother to bring my father into the house to live, which was the way it would have to be in order for my mother to take care of my grandmother. So they put off their getting married. Well my grandmother died the first week of December in 1924, and my mother and father, by getting a special dispensation from the church, were not called out in church. In other words, no one knew they were getting married. And my mother, of course they were grief-stricken, because grandmother was only sixty-three years old when she died. So they were married very quietly, went to the Rectory, had dinner in one of the local hotels and got on the train and went to Boston for three days, and that was their honeymoon. But the interim between my grandmother's death and my mother and dad getting married, my mother was not allowed, according to her family ethics, to stay alone in that house with the idea that my father would be coming to visit. Now he had been coming to this house for probably nine to ten years. They had been engaged for seven. So a cousin, and older woman, was brought to that house, named Mary Costello, and she stayed in the house to make sure there was a chaperone there at all times. I had said to my mother at one time, what would happen if dad hadn't waited? And the

answer I got was one that completely shocked me. She said, "That would have been it." In other words, my mother, even though she loved my father dearly, her mother came first. That was the way she was brought up. She was made to leave school because her mother needed her at home. The others all managed to get through school and all that. And she was always the one that, when anything had to be done... But I think the funniest thing about my mother's background was when she used to speak about the letters they would get from Ireland, because my grandfather was one of twenty-one children. My mother had told me that there were four nuns in the family, but we've never quite been able to verify that. One I know of because I have a picture of her, and she was a nursing nun during World War I and was given a medal by the French Government because she had fifty-two [unclear]. That may be the wrong figure, but that's the figure my mother used, seriously ill soldiers, and she nursed and took care and didn't lose one of them. They all lived. That apparently was considered quite a feat in those days. Mother was always quite proud of this fact, because the next generation and the one following that, although there is now one of my cousins studying to be a priest.

S: Now was your father catholic also?

A: My father was brought up by a Catholic mother and a non-catholic father. The name Wilcox is definitely English. But my grandfather converted to Catholicism in his later years, because he wanted to be buried with my grandmother as a catholic in blessed ground. That was his theory. It was a shock to the neighborhood, because no one knew he was going for instructions. And in those days they made their First Communion and Confirmation on the same day. In other words, a child who now makes it...well I made mine at age seven and confirmation after age twelve. He made his on the same day. And when he stood up in the church, I guess there was this buzz went right through the church because they could not believe that...what Web Wilcox had become a catholic. But my father was very proud of the fact. But always very lenient. I was always allowed to go in high school, to any dance or prom or whatever that was run by any organization, whether it was Protestant, Jewish or whatever, I was allowed to go. Now I know that there were girls in my class who were catholic, should, let's put it this way, had catholic, a catholic parent and they were not allowed to go to a catholic dance, because they were being brought up in the mother's religion, which was protestant. I never ran into that problem and I was always very lenient. I found it was a little bit of, uh, what's the word I'm trying to think of, prejudice when it came to who I would date. In other words, they would prefer I date an Irish boy and my mother never got over the fact that I married a boy with a French name and to her dying day, I'm sure, that even though she was unable to speak because of a stroke, that in her mind if someone said to her, your daughter's name is LeLacheur, she would have said, "Oh yes, but his mother's name was Mahoney, (S: Laughs) and her maiden name was Maloney." So that made it okay.

S: So they're always a little bit prejudice.

A: Yes, but it...I mean those things are not... I have now have a Swedish daughter-in-law. I have an Irish daughter-in-law, and I have a Greek son-in-law, and we are a family. I love them all equally. We all get along. It's been very interesting because we get all the varied foods, and I think it's nice. I want my grandchildren to grow up knowing the ethnic background of their Greek relation, family and their French-Armenian on one family, and you're got English, Irish and French on our side of the family and it's a mixture, and I think it makes for a great blend.

S: That makes for typical Americans.

A: It does. It's a melting pot and this is what it's all about. But my dad used to say that when they worked, the boys worked in the Carpet Mills. And they had to be, in order to be at work, they had to go to five o'clock Mass and he said it was his father, who was non-catholic, who would make up those boys and tell them it was time to get up to go to Mass.

S: Well were there many mixed marriages then in religion?

A: No.

S: Because you seem to be talking about that.

A: There really weren't. There really weren't. I mean, you found Polish married Polish, and Lithuanian, Lithuanian, and every once in awhile you'd have the Irish that would marry that was like... I can cite one family, they were neighbors. And there was an Italian man, and he married to an Irish girl. Now it's the norm. In those days it was a little bit odd. You didn't see interracial marriages at all. There were no blacks in our neighborhood at all.

S: Were there any blacks in Lowell then?

A: Very few.

S: There were some.

A: In our neighborhood, in the few years, you know, when I was old enough to realize that there was a difference, there was one black family.

S: You mean you didn't know there was a difference when you were young?

A: Well, I never saw a black person.

S: Oh, all right.

A: All of a sudden this one family moved into the neighborhood. And I can remember the man as a little, little tiny man, and at the Fourth of July carnival, he put his head through a canvas and very derogatory painting above his head, and it was pay a nickel, hit the man, and get a cigar.

S: What did the sign say?

A: Hit the nigger and get a cigar.

S: I thought it was hit the coon.

A: Whichever. Hit the coon. It could have been, could have been. Hit the coon and get a cigar, right. He was the nicest little man you'd ever hope to meet. Family man and when I went to High School, his son, who had gone to public school, Butler, was a year behind me, became a Boy Officer in the Regiment and the year that I was chosen by the boy who was the Colonel of the Regiment to be the lady of the evening and lead the grand...

**Tape I, side A ends**  
**Tape I, side B begins**

A: ...wasn't too aware of what was happening. I was so nervous, but we came through the Memorial Auditorium, up the ballroom, up the dance floor first, and then we went off into a quadrille-type thing, you know, two. And then we came back around four. Then we came back and at the end of the line, getting into the [Lieutenants] there is little, my little friend from Hosford Square. And there wasn't any other black girl in the school that he could ask to go to a prom, and in those days you wouldn't ask a white girl. So he had his sister. And they were just adorable. He had his uniform on and he had a smile on his face. I can still see him. I don't know what ever became of him, but they were the only black family in that, that whole neighborhood. Of course the theatres, you'd see them. The boys would be standing outside the theatres with the shoe shine boxes. That was always a big thing.

S: You mean the black boys?

A: No. There weren't... there was only this one, one boy and he would do it, yes. But that was a way for boys to make money. In those days they used to, they'd empty out cellars and anything. We think it's great now. We think, well some people think it's great, some people think it's a nuisance to have to take the bottles back to the store to get your deposit. But that was the way we used to pay for many of our activities, was going around and picking bottles. You know, I'd go out in the back hall at our house and see if there were any two cent bottles, or any five cent bottles, and take them back to the store, and that's (--)

S: Which were the two-cent bottles and which were the five?

A: The small, individual size bottles of coke would be like two cents. A quart of tonic would be a five cent bottles. So this is not new, this business of refunds, you know. But of course I will never get over the difference in prices. I think...I can remember going to the store with my mother and my mother was meticulous about everything that she did. And as a child I was not allowed to do anything. I never made a meal. I never ironed. I never washed. If I had soiled clothes, I just left them and my mother washed them and when I needed them again, they were in the drawer.

S: Is that because you were an only child?

A: I think so.

S: She didn't work?

A: No, mother never, although she worked one six weeks. One summer, at the Nu Knit.  
[Unclear]

S: Where did your father work? [Repeats] Where did your father work?

A: My father worked, well, it was varied. He worked at the Harvard Brewery. He worked in a cigar store at one point. And then he went to work at the Harvard Brewery, because that was supposed to be the big thing.

S: That was in Lowell wasn't it?

A: The Harvard Brewery was up on Plain Street, up right where Sears Roebucks, in that plaza. There was a huge big building. The draft, draft houses and bottling houses, and it was a very large, very large business. You used to see Harvard Trucks everywhere. Very, very, it was a highly thought of beer. It was not, you know, some people say, oh, terrible, but it... I'm not a beer drinker, but I listened and I heard. Well prohibition came in and that was the end of the Harvard Brewery. So my father was a very enterprising man. He was always a man who was never too proud. I think if it literally had come to it, he would have begged because he had two things that were of primary interest to him, his wife and his daughter. He would do anything to get money. And he had two, a brother-in-law, actually two brother-in-laws, one in each family who were Florists, and particularly my mother's brother. He would give him a list of bills that had not been, that were being ignored, to put it bluntly. In those days when you courted a girl, you sent a gardenia or an orchid, and it was the thing to do. In those days flowers smelled like flowers. They don't smell like they must smell now, they don't smell at all. These hybrids are ridiculous. They inbred them so much that there's nothing left. But a carnation in those days, you knew you had a carnation. It's like walking into a funeral home, it was overpowering. Now you walk into a funeral home and you don't smell anything. It's because the flowers are you know, are coming up from Bolivia and Maryland and all these different places, whereas years ago, if they wanted carnations, they went to Tewksbury. They wanted something else they went to Chelmsford, or... It was all nearby. Well anyway, my father would go out and collect bills and then he would get a percentage of whatever he collected. Well some weeks he would come home with a grand total of six dollars. If it was nine, that was a big thing. And it was difficult. And I didn't have, you know...

S: And how much were they paying for rent at the time? Do you know?

A: About I think eighteen dollars a month.

S: Umhm.

A: As I recall. And then of course I remember gas lights. And we had the Victorian bathtub and we had the wooden box with the chain that you pulled. And I think it's hysterical now, because I go through all these catalogs and now they're ultra. They're ultra.

S: Did you have a bathtub?

A: We had a bathtub. Yes, we did.

S: Any hot, running water or just cold running water?

A: No, we had hot water in the winter when the big, copper tank was attached to the stove. But I can remember everybody with a black stove, and I can remember my father, when he would babysit for me, would put newspaper over the door of the oven and then he'd take my little, flannel nightgown, or pajamas, or whatever and lay them on there and heat them up, and then wrap me up in blankets because we, literally, in the winter, lived in the kitchen, the bathroom, the pantry and the kitchen. That was it. The bedrooms were not heated. The dining room was not heated. And eventually we got a heater for the dining room, but that was really only used when my father got the big job on the W.P.A. at thirteen dollars a week.

S: Uh huh.

A: Which was a big thing because you knew you were going to get it every week, plus they had food stamps and they had cotton stamps. I can remember, I think there's some poor lady that probably never got over the shock of my mother taking me in to Cherry and Webbs, which was considered, you know, it's still a very nice store, but in those days it was something to really be able to go to Cherry and Webbs and buy something. And my mother took me in and picked out a raincoat that was cotton-poplin and it had a cotton flannel lining. And she was very careful and very specific to get one that would be cotton, and by giving the cotton stamps, say the coat cost nine dollars, I can't really remember, that sounds like it was, I was a senior in High School at the time, and mother handed the woman four dollars and fifty-cents and the stamps. Well, the woman almost went into cardiac arrest. [Laughs]

S: The saleslady?

A: The saleslady! You know, in those days they wore the black dresses, and the white collars and the black little bows and their orthopedic shoes. They were very prim and proper. And all of a sudden she's presented with this mess of stamps and she didn't know what to do. And I stood there with my hand up over my eyes. (S: Embarrassed?) I was embarrassed to death you know. Of course I was thrilled the next day when I wore the coat to school and everybody thought it was nifty. It was one of these foreign intrigue type raincoats, you know. But I remember when my mother would take me to Harry Bass United Cloak, Cloak and Suit I think it was called, on lower Central Street and buy me boys coats, which I despised. But the idea was, they were heavier, they didn't cost as much as girls coats that were all frilly with pleats and fur collars and all this type of thing. I would probably get two or three years out of that same coat. You had a coat. You did not have a coat for school and a coat for Sunday.

S: Now you were just one child and you had these problems. (A: Umhm) What happened to the large families, and there were many large families, weren't there?

A: I don't, I really, I really don't know. I mean it was strange because I'm talking about this now, but in those days, you didn't discuss these things. You didn't discuss, I mean now I know in relation to the times what my father made, you know, because it was...but my mother never

discussed finances. The one salvation was when my, when things were really bad and my mother's brother came to live with us. He was given, he had a heated bedroom. And it was so funny because you think about it in relation to another meal, you know, I mean another mouth to feed, but he didn't have breakfast at the house and he wasn't home for lunch. He was home for dinner and he was home for Sunday dinner. But he paid the grand total of five dollars a week. Now this not only was my mother doing his laundry, he directed traffic. In those days there was a group of Police Officers who did nothing but direct traffic. We didn't have the lights like they have now. And they had their stations. And he had custom-made shirts that were twice the width of an average man's shirt in order for the freedom of his arms. The collars he had done in a Chinese Laundry, but the shirts were hand done. My mother would do fourteen of those shirts every week.

S: Now the collars were detached?

A: Detached, and they went to the Chinese Laundry because they had to be really crisp. He wore, they wore riding breeches. They had special short jackets, and they wore riding breeches. The pants had probably, oh, fifteen, twenty buttons on the side, And then over that they wore what they called pookies, and they were strapped on. Now he had been injured. He was struck by a fire truck. As the fire truck went around a corner, the back end of it hit him. So he had an arthritic problem and he could not bend over that well to do this. So my mother was there in the morning to do it. She never could leave the house until he left because she had to put these shoes on and everything, you know. When I think of it, you know, the meals and my father had to do things that he was unable. And then he brought a dog, and then a dog became a dog and then that dog was used to breed. And he brought another mutt, the daughter of this dog, and then that dog was bred and at one point we had six dogs, which were not in the house, you know, they were out on the back porch, there was a shed. But I can remember going to Mass and coming home and being told to go to my grandmothers for a visit. And I came home for dinner and I was told to go someplace for dinner, and then I was told to go to the movies, which was our routine, anyway. Finally, about six o'clock that night I came home and I was allowed in the house, but the dog was having difficulty with the birth, but I was not allowed to be there. You know, I mean if you were a farm child, you saw these things as normal, but we were very sheltered. Like you say, we didn't discuss being poor, although in a way I don't think of it as being poor. I always had nice dresses, but I wore them. I didn't have a new dress every day in the week. My mother never sent anything to the cleaners. My wool skirts, my aunt would like get remnant and make me a beautiful pleated skirts, and the grand total would be forty-five cents. She'd use a zipper she had. She had'd pay fifteen cents a yard for the remnant up at the Lawrence Mill.

S: Your aunt was working in the mill?

A: My aunt worked in the shoe shop, and she ah, by this time though she would love to have a family. But I would not have had the clothes I had, like the gowns she would make. I remember the first gown I ever had which was probably the one I always liked the most. She went into a textile mill on Jackson Street and bought material. It was taffeta, white taffeta and she paid twenty-nine cents a yard. And I can still see her doing it. She took a brown paper bag and made, well I would say a heart-shape, and that was the shape of the gown. Straight in the back and

trimmed with lace and it had American beauty velvet straps, and it came to a point at the waist and she gathered all this. It was absolutely exquisite. Of course my hair was very dark and I always had a lot of hair. So I never, all the dresses I should say, had, usually had something on the shoulder that I couldn't put a corsage or anything on. Usually I'd just put a white gardenia in my hair and that almost became like a trademark. I had that, except for one time that I got the gardenia sent to the house and my mother called me. By this time I was now working after school and I got a call at the office of Kresges to report. And my mother said, "You are going to be panicky, Anita. Your corsage is wilted." It was brown. And I thought... So I called up my Uncle Neil, he had a florist shop near Moynihan, and said, "What do I do?" Needless to say, I hadn't come to his shop. And he said, "Well, when you get out of work, come up." So I walked from, by this time we had moved from the South End. I walked from Kresges up to Appleton Street, picked up a beautiful orchid, which he gave me very kindly for free, and then I walked over to O'Brien Terrace, which is, you know, up by City Hall. By the time I got home, that was in January, I was cold and I was tired, and believe me I wasn't in any mood to go to any prom. But by the time the boy got there and I appeared with the orchid, I thought he was going to have a stroke, because he had visions of his father having to pay for an orchid. So I very quickly explained that my uncle had given it to me and that was it, and his father was told he only had to pay for a gardenia.

S: That was interesting. Now tell me were you working while you were going to High School?

A: Yes.

S: You were working in the office? Kresges was downtown Lowell, right?

A: Kresges was downtown Lowell. First I was, turned sixteen in October. I immediately, in nineteen forty-one I immediately went right into Woolworths. Four of us went looking for a job, which is, I learned, a mistake. So I went back the next day by myself and I got hired. They gave me an application, second trip, and I was hired to go into work for Christmas. So I worked at Christmas and I at Easter. And then the following summer I used to go to work at four o'clock on Saturday afternoon because all the stores were open until nine. And downtown Lowell was like a carnival on Saturday. Everybody went downtown. You might go down in the morning and spend two hours, you might go down at two in the afternoon and you would see the same people going by your house whether you lived in the Acre, when we lived in the Acre I saw the people walking down Broadway and down Dummer Street, and you'd see them coming back almost at the same time. They might go down at two and come back at five. Sometimes maybe it would be seven if they stopped to eat or something, you know.

S: Why was this Saturday? It was an outing for them?

A: It was...It was...Well people worked. The stores weren't open at night. (S: I see) They were closed Wednesday afternoons. Saturday, the stores were open until nine o'clock. The buses ran in those days until eleven thirty at night. So that was some...in some cases women had to have, you know, baby sitters were not the thing at that time. I don't think I ever had a baby sitter. If I did it was some neighborhood girl who just wanted to take me someplace, or



something. My mother never paid anyone to babysit me, the same way, I never paid anybody to babysit my three children.

S: What stores were in downtown Lowell at the time you working there?

A: There was Grants Five and Ten. There was Scott's. There was, there were two Kresges at one point in time. There was McCartneys, Lincoln Store. We had A.G. Pollard's. We had Gagnon's. We had Bon Marche, which is now where Jordan Marsh is. You had Nugent's, the Enterprise Store. It was a beehive. And then you had a lot of...

S: How about Paige's?

A: Paige's Drug Store. Well I don't know, Paige's we used to call it, not Paige's Drug Store, Paige's Drug Store was up in Cupples Square. Downtown, that's where we would meet. If you were going to meet anyone to go to the C.Y.A. Dance, or to take the bus to go to Lakeview to dance, that's where you met, at Paige's. If you stood at Paige's I think the whole world went by there. It was fun, great fun on Saturday nights when the fraternities at Lowell Textile University, Lowell Textile School at that time, it was called, they would have their hazing. And they would have to come into down town, and they'd have little wagon, and they'd have horrendous things. Some of them are unmentionables, but.

S: Like what?

A: Bedpan in one.

S: Oh, that's all right.

A: And they'd be dressed as a nurse and they'd have a baby carriage, and one of the smaller boys would be in the baby carriage, dressed up. They'd have somebody on stilts. I mean it was just fun. And they would go down and cross over. Brockelman's Market was on the corner of Bridge and East Merrimack Street. That was a tremendously large market. They had one in Lawrence and one in Lowell, and that was open until again, nine o'clock on Saturday night. They had been open on Friday night also. You had, Schulty's Cigar Store was on the opposite corner, you had the Triangle Cigar store at the corner of Prescott.

S: Did all the buses converge there?

A: All the buses, everything went out of the square and at eleven-thirty the starter stood in the middle of the street, and blew his whistle, and all the buses left for Lakeview, Dracut, Bridge Street, Christian Hill, South Lowell, Wigginvile, Edson Cemetary, Billerica, Chelmsford. They all left at the same time and you had better be on that last bus, or you didn't go to the dance for maybe three weeks, because money was, you had the thirty-five cents to go to the dance, maybe five cents for the bus, and you had five cents for a coke. So you probably went out with a grand total of fifty cents. Well you had spent the thirty-five cents to get in to the dance, and you had better keep that nickel to get home. And you may have had, you know, a coke. It was...once in awhile someone, as you got older and into your senior year of school, there might be one boy

that had a car. But of course, this was, I graduated from High School in forty-three, which is right in the middle of the war, so you had rationing as far as gas was concerned. Even to go to a prom, the proms in those days were at the Rex, was a big recreational complex, compound. Complex, compound, whatever, you had bowling, they used to have wrestling there. They had bingo games there. Downstairs was an A&P Market. They had a beautiful restaurant. Upstairs was what they called the Penthouse, where they had weddings and proms. Our senior prom was there. But the boys used to have to hide, their fathers maybe would let them have the car, but they would hide the cars on the outskirts of downtown and then they dropped us off at the restaurant and then go and park the car someplace, because the police, or a civilian defense or whatever, were checking. And if they saw license plates around too often, they would question where the gas came from. And, you know, we had meatless Tuesdays. And you'd work, again working in the Five and Ten. Nylons, they didn't have any because of the war. Then after I graduated from high school I went to work for The Electric Light Company. And we'd get word that Kennedy's Butter Store had butter. So we'd run out to get the butter. Or the Clearweave store had stockings. So you'd run out to get the nylons. Or somebody had something else. I mean it was a constant... When I think about it now, how the company was so lenient that they would let us run out. Of course, my mother, if she knew there was butter coming in on Tuesday, would be the first one in the butter line. Then Tuesday nights, there was always a listing of stores that would have specials. They were called Wednesday morning specials. And as you said, with the income that we had, you know, how did I manage to dress the way I did. Well my mother would be the first one at the store. If the store opened at nine o'clock, she was there at ten of. And when that door opened, she was a little, tiny women, but she could make her legs go and she would be the first one. If she was looking for a nightgown that happened to be on sale, as a matter of fact she lost a friend one time because they both latched on to the same nightgown, similar to what goes on in Filene's Basement. And the lady was not really friendly, but she lived in the same neighborhood. And she was pulling on one end, and my mother was pulling on the other end to get a nightgown that was half price to the grand tune of seventy-five cents. So I did get two seventy-five cents nightgowns.

S: So what happened? Did they become? They lost friendship?

A: They never spoke and it was only a passing thing where if they met in the local neighborhood market, or bakery that they would speak.

S: Were they from the same parish, both of them?

A: No. (S: No?) No, they were not. That may have made a difference too, I don't know. But every time I'd see that lady in years later I'd think of the incidence, you know. Or my mother would call me on the phone at the Electric Light and say, shoes, I found this pair of shoes at Cherry and Webb's. So instead of having a coffee break, which we didn't call coffee-breaks in those days, we were allowed fifteen minutes in the morning and fifteen minutes in the afternoon to go to the ladies room or girls room, as we used to call it. I would race thorough the allyway behind Household, out the back door of the electric light, through the alley by household, run through Lincoln Store or Prince's whichever, there were two, there was a back store and a front store for both of those, and across the street Cherry and Webbs. Immediately try on the shoes, saw whether they fit or not, problem being I had very narrow feet, very hard to fit. And if they'd

fit, I'd say, see you later and I'd race back, and back to the fourth floor and back to my desk and go back to work. But you were asking me about my first job. I, as I say, worked five hours on Saturday afternoon, which ruined my summers completely. I couldn't go away on the weekend or anything. And I got twenty-nine point five cents per hour, for a grand total of a dollar and twenty-five cents for working five hours. They took out for social security. I got a grand total of a dollar and a quarter for working five hours.

S: Wow.

A: And now, I mean, when they tell me what the minimum is now. Then when I was a senior in high school I switched over the Kresges Five and Ten, and I was chosen to be what they called permanent part-time, meaning I went in Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, from one-thirty until five-thirty. The reason we got out of school early was the Bartlett School had burnt down, and the Bartlett School pupils had to go to Lowell High School. So we were, our day started earlier and we got out earlier. So I went to work at one thirty, and I used to manage to get out, walk down the street, get an english muffin or something, and be on the counter. And I worked in hardware, which meant nuts, bolts, cutting window shades, all the really nicer jobs, and they always knew I was coming in. So they would never get stock. They would leave it for me. It was like being the runt of the litter. I got all the dirty jobs to do. And I would have to go screeching down to the stock room that I despised, back up. And then Wednesday afternoon I had off. Saturday, if you went to work at nine, you were out at six. If you... No, at seven. If you went to work at ten you got out at eight. If you went to work at eleven in the morning, you went to work until nine.

S: Did you have an hour for lunch?

A: A half hour. (S: Half hour?) No, I beg your pardon, an hour, I did have an hour. I got seven dollars and fifty cents for working a week. Now kids start new jobs they get that for an hour. And when I left work in nineteen forty-nine, I was a stenographer and there were only probably, in all of the Mass Electric, the two plants, the downtown office and the plant on Perry Street, I worked in the Managers Office, which was a prestigious job to be in. I don't sound like I was a confidential employee, the way I'm telling my life's history, but when I had to be confidential, I was, and when I don't, I'm not, let's put it that way! I made a grand total of forty-nine dollars a week. And when Bill and I were married he made sixty-two dollars a week. Now he started at thirty-nine dollars a week at the Electric Light in nineteen forty-six, and he paid twenty dollars board, and five dollars for insurance. So we didn't have much money for dating. But it's strange, you made do.

S: You made do. Now tell me about when you went to G.E. They didn't know you were Catholic?

A: Oh. I went to work at Mass... When I went to work at the Electric Light, my Uncle was friendly with one of the officials, and he arranged that I would have an interview. I was still a senior in high school. And I went in on the interview. And one of my... I have two faults. One is complete honesty. Probably that's the number one fault. And the second one is, my brain has always been an inch and a half outside my mouth. So that I say things and then wish, oh, oh, let

me get those words and put them back in. But you can't do it that way. But in this particular case, my honesty got me a job. I did all the things I was told to do by the teacher who had trained us in stenographic training. I wore my white gloves and I had worn my hat and my nylons. And she had warned us, you know, no saddle shoes, which is what I always wore. And no bobby socks, and no pleated skirts, and the whole bit. No sloppy joe sweaters. So I did my whole bit, my pearls and the whole thing. And I was on my way to a wake with my dad, and he waited in the lobby downstairs for me while I went upstairs and filled out this application. Well, the application was one thing, but then it came to the personal interview. And I was ushered into the inner office, which later, three years later became my job. I was conducting interviews and I was taking people in, bringing them in for their personal interview, but I gave out the applications and did the preliminaries. But anyway, I was ushered in. My knees knocking, twenty palms and you know, I think if the man had looked at me you know, any way at all except with a smile on his face, I would have burst into tears and dashed out, because I was, if you can believe it, extremely shy, having been raised with a family of adults. You know, there were three adults and me, and my father was extremely a disciplinarian and I was not allowed to speak unless I was spoken to, at any time. So therefore I was very withdrawn into myself. And by into the Electric Light I did come out of that. But to back up on my story, he began asking me questions, did I, how well did I type. And I told him I was no world beater. And did I like shorthand, and I said not particularly. And I thought filing is just about my speed, you know, if I could... Clerking, that's what I was interested in. I wasn't interested in getting into any of these specializations. I was just interested in a job, and particularly at the Electric Light because they had a girls club that most active, very social, proms, theatre, parties. They had beach parties, all sorts of things. So I had my choice of either the Telephone or the Electric Light and I chose to go with the Electric Light. So I was told later that the reason I got the job was because I was honest. I said I was no world-beaten. I was willing to take a job and I did. I took a job and I went in as a clerk and at that time the Federal Government had come into the company and said that everything had to be inventoried. In other words, they wanted to know the net total assets of all companies. It wasn't just Mass Electric, which was the only Electric Light when I worked there. But they had to do this in everything so that they would know your company is worth X number of dollars. But that meant they had to know how much that chair cost, or that desk. The men went around and they had little brass plates, and they put little metal numbers on them, and then everything was inventoried. And as a clerk, there were four or five girls, we worked in these

**Tape I ends**  
**Tape II, side A begins**

Male voice: Well it's recording now. I wonder if that's got.. it's. It's on eleven now.

S: It's recording? All right. So...

Male: It should be recording, yah.

S: Okay. Let's see if it is recording. Let's put the play on, or review. Whatever you're saying now should be (---)

Male: What I'm saying now should be on.

S: Yah, that should be on. [Loud noise]

M: Well I think what you better do is, no, we didn't turn it back that last time, did yah?

S: No, we put the recorder...[Loud buzzing] All right, we'll continue with the second taping.

A: After about six weeks I got a call one day that I was to report to the fourth floor. Well that was the inner sanctum. That's where all the officials worked. And it happened to be a rainy day and it was coolish. So I went to work in my typical high school uniform, saddle shoes, socks, pleated skirt, sweater. And all of a sudden I realized I'm going up to the fourth floor. Well I didn't have a chance to leave and go home and change my clothes. So I thought I'm going to be fired, because for the first six months you were a temporary employee, you know, and then you went into the union, or whatever. So I was brought back to the same office, to the same man who had hired me, and he began by telling me, did I know why I was there? I very humbly said, no. Great trepidation. Well how would you like to come up to this floor to work? Well, that to me was like going into another world. And I said, "Well, I'll give it a try." I knew nothing. I had nothing to lose and everything to gain, figuring I would also get a raise, which I did. A grand total of two dollars. So I went back downstairs, and I'm telling the girls who I was working with, what had happened, and what had transpired. They all said, "Oh, I wouldn't work for that particular person." It was a female woman and (--)

S: What did they call her?

A: Well, witch was one of the better terms. No, in those days, young ladies really did not swear. At least the ones I associated with in the Electric Light. They were a very nice class of girls that worked there. But it was just that they had been there longer than I. I was the newest one. I was only seventeen years old. And all of a sudden here I am being transported from a back office with a bunch of you know, engineers and these girls with whom I had become very friendly. They were older than I was, they had been there longer, and all of a sudden, again, the runt of the litter is going up to the fourth floor, to the inner sanctum. So I felt a little bit nervous about it, because I thought, what am I getting into? They say she is a taskmaster, she'd a slave driver, she's this, she was there since the first brick was put in the building, which was an exaggeration, but it was, she was a dedicated lady. That's the only way I can describe her and we became great friends in years later. But anyway, I went to a man who used to visit my uncle's florist shop and I recognized him as being one of the men in the Accounting Department. So I asked for permission to go and speak to him, and the man I worked for said fine. I went in, I talked to him. His name was Tommy Davidson. And I explained, but he didn't even know who I was, I was John Mahoney's niece and blah, blah, blah. And how are you, how is your mother and blah, blah. I explained my predicament. What should I do? He said, "Take the job." He said, "Anything you learn from Evelyn Wilson, you will never forget. She is perfection." Again, same as the girls had said, a taskmaster, slave driver. Anything you wanted to say, that was it. You put it all in one little bundle and that was Miss Human dynamo that I was going to work with. Well I soon learned that I could, as long as I sort of kept out of her way, I was safe.

Until one day, the six months had passed and in a, just a general conversation, we now had left the South End. We were living in North Common Housing Project, O'Brien Terrace. We were the first family, one of the first families to move into the house. As a matter of fact, we moved in on Saturday and Sunday was Pearl Harbor. It was a day I'll never forget. And I will never forget the Greek music going by the Coffee Houses. It was a complete new world to go from the South End to the Greek neighborhood, and we loved it. But anyway, she said to me, "Did you graduate from the Bartlett School?" Which would have been where I would have gone to school, living in that area. Without thinking, I don't think now that I should have had to think. I wasn't about to lie about it. I very quickly said, "No, I went to St. Peter's School." Well she got up from her spinning, it was an adjustable chair, and without moving a button that chair spun for five minutes after she got off that chair I swear. She was just so, I think, incensed to think that there I was working for her and I was a catholic, which is unfortunate because there were many Catholics who worked in the office. The manager's secretary was catholic. Grace Murphy who did all the cooking demonstrations. And sweet women. I mean, men, women, there were many, many, many Catholics. But it was just that she had this one little quirk. She did not particular like them. Nothing was ever said, but it was always, I had that in the back of my head. So that I avoided any confrontation about religion, and about politics, and about anything that I thought was going to upset her. And after probably fifteen minutes, she came back from the ladies room and sat down and it was very quiet for the rest of that day but still, that following Christmas, no, the following Christmas, this all went on, I was hired in June, so that my six months would be up. She was ill and unable to come into the office like the day before Christmas. Well when I went home that day, we were always let out of work early, there was a package at my home and it had been delivered by a Dr. Emma Slaughter. There were very few women doctors in Lowell then. There was a Dr. Janet Rollinson, who was a Dentist, and Dr. Emma Slaughter was the physician. I can't remember, really, of any others. But Dr. Slaughter had gone to Miss Wilson's house to treat her, and she asked her to bring the gift to my house. Now that to me is not a woman who dislikes someone. But it's just that once she got over the initial shock, that my name was Wilcox and I was catholic and not protestant, she accepted it. But my aunt had had the same problem when she was in high school. Her picture had appeared in the newspaper as being part of St. Peter's reunion, and they used to do that. They used to come and take pictures and put them in the Evening Leader, or The Lowell Sun, or The Courier- Citizen, whatever. And it was a very...newspapers in those days were very local, very personal. If you had a shower, there would be a picture in, or a wedding, birthday party. Now it's all what's going in the Christian Science Magazine or the Wall Street Journal. If I wanted to read those things, I'd buy those newspaper. I don't want to read it in my local newspaper. But that's another issue.

A: Anyway, back at...My aunt went to school the next day and one of the teachers said, "Miss Wilcox, I didn't realize you were catholic." And my aunt said, "I didn't realize that it was important." Now up until that time this teacher had been very nasty. My aunt was an extremely bright student and she had been really, she out did herself trying to do little things that would be nasty. And believe it or not, that same thing repeated itself when I was a senior in high school, because I went to one of my teacher's and she was in an organization as an officer with this same aunt. And I asked if she would give me permission to use her name on this application for the Electric Light. And I explained who I was and I was my aunt's niece, you know. Her eyes got very wide and she said, "I never realized that you were Margaret Moynihan's niece." And I said,

“Oh, well I am.” “Well, oh, by all means.” And it was all a repetition because she was really very picky at me also.

S: Oh, she had been?

A: She had been. But as soon as she realized who I was, it changed. So I mean they’ll... You know, let's face it, there's been prejudices since probably Adam and Eve and there will be until the end of time.

S: But what other prejudices have you come up against? Any other conflicts?

A: Not really. I can remember...this may sound ridiculous, but people put people in little boxes. Oh, you live in this area so therefore you must be this kind of person. Or, you live in what they would call a ritzy neighborhood, therefore you're a nicer person than someone who lives in a slum area. That does not make a person.

S: Were there...when you were...

A: We were again, we were put into categories. If you lived in the Highlands you were one thing. If you lived in Little Canada, which is no longer of course, you were something else.

S: Which ones were the good ones and which ones not so good?

A: Well the Highlands, Belvidere was usually where the big money was, larger homes.

S: A better section of the city?

A: Yes it was, yes. Outer, you know, from like say Nesmith Street, out that area was always considered...although just the word Belvidere sort of encompassed everything from East Merrimack Street to Tewksbury, whatever. So that was always one area. Of course when I was a child, it was not as built up as it is now. So that you didn't have all these streets with the smaller houses. You had these big streets with big houses, big Victorian houses that are now you know, these three hundred and fifty thousand dollar houses. Fine. The Highlands was always considered a very nice area. There was Ayer City, there was you know, the Flats they called it. There was the...

S: Where is that?

A: The flats? People, different people would argue the point. Some people say the flats is the area that I speak of as the South End. Upper...

S: Oh, and was that considered good at that time?

A: Yes, but I mean the flats was another section of that South End. The flats would be like down, when you went down Wamesit Street hill, you went down Whipple Street hill, you went down Abbott Street hill. All of these streets went downhill to a flatter area and that would be like

Kinsman Street, Crosby Street, Kinsman Street, Swift Street uh, Newhall street. That would be more, and then you start up the hill again on Lawrence Street, or up Gorham Street.

S: Up the hill was good and down the hill was not?

A: No, it wasn't necessarily that. It was just that even sections of the city were broken up into areas. You know, like you had, you have Centralville. Well the area on one side of Lakeview avenue was like, maybe a lot of Polish people around Colburn Street and all that.

S: Oh, there were ethnic groups in this area?

A: Yes, in that area. Well there's a Polish National Catholic Church there. And then you go up like on the other side of Bridge Street, you've got St. Michael's Parish, which is predominantly Irish. Now that encompasses a lot of Dracut which was always French. A lot of French and Polish people. But I mean, it was, it was funny, and I was never aware of that. I mean to me someone lived in the Highlands, they lived in the Sacred Heart Parish, we used to call that uh, I can't think of it we used to call it as kids. We didn't say we're going to the Sacred Heart. We used to say, we're going some place. But there was Swede Village, which is where the Swedish people lived. And they had Ayer City, and you had (---)

S: Where, where did the Swedish people live?

A: Oh, at that time the Lutheran Church was up on Meadowcroft Street. So you had...

S: Where, what part of the city is that in?

A: That's the Sacred Heart, up off Moore Street.

S: Oh, I see.

A: It would be the Sacred Heart Parish as a whole.

S: I see.

A: But the Lutheran Church was up in that area, up around Meadowcroft Street. And now of course it's out in Chelmsford. But again, you had the uh, the American Church was on Lawrence Street, and now they're out in Chelmsford. They took over the old Belvidere School.

S: Now those ethnic groups still persist? They all live together in these different areas?

A: They did. Most of the Armenian people lived in the, again, in the South End, but they lived sort of down in lower Central Street, like on Tyler Street, Charles Street, Lower Lawrence Street and like even Middlesex Street (--) When I first moved to Middlesex Street I would...

S: This house you mean?



A: This house. It was thirty-six years ago. I had lived in Billerica for two years when I was first married. When we first moved here and someone would say to me, "Oh, you live in Lowell now?" And I'd say, "Yes. I'd say, I live on outer Middlesex Street, way out!" Because lower Middlesex Street, around the old depot and all that, that had gone into great disrepair. You know, that was...but as a child there was a couple of hotels there. There was the Capitol Theatre, and you had a lot of little hat stores and cobbler shops and the St. Charles Hotel. There were a lot of little hotels around there, but once the depot left and Barlow's Market left and then we lost the hill that came down there and the Waldorf Restaurant at the corner. That was a nice little area. And then all of a sudden with the new, I'm trying to think of it, the Lord Overpass, that changed that whole neighborhood completely. So that Middlesex Street sort of stops and then it begins again and it's a real strange thing, but I never realized it until I was thinking, contemplating what I was thinking, contemplating what I was going to be asked in this interview, that Middlesex Street is the longest street in Lowell. Do you realize that it goes...

S: I didn't realize that.

A: It goes, my husband and I checked it in the books and it goes from, well from Central Street where it begins, all the way to Vinal Square in Chelmsford, North Chelmsford. Of course it becomes Middlesex Street, Chelmsford once you hit the Lowell line, but the number goes into the two thousands. So it is, it's the longest street. Now Lakeview Avenue goes out that way and you go into the two thousands but the numbers stop at the Lowell line. But then they don't begin as low numbers. They just continue the numbers on. (S: um hm) So that's why you get these high numbers, but they're, they're not still in Lowell. But I became aware of neighborhoods when I was going to, as I said, I lead this Grand March and it was a great honor and I was thrilled, you know, to pieces. I was, a special dress and my cousin sent me to Bon Marche to have my hair done by her hairdresser. My aunts were in the gallery. In those days you used to go and fill up the balcony to see the prom. They'd have oriental rugs and couches and potted palms and lamps. It was a beautiful setting. And that was the first year that the boys had gone into these military style uniforms, up until ...

S: And where was, where was the prom held?

A: Memorial Auditorium.

S: Oh. That's huge.

A: But I remember being in the locker room at Lowell High School and overheard a conversation that was going on in the next row of lockers. And I think it was probably one of the few times I left that locker, one... it was the only time that I left that locker room in tears, because I overheard a group of girls saying they just could not understand why the colonel was taking someone that wasn't from Belvidere, or the Highlands, and that she lived in the housing project. And I was crushed. Absolutely demolished! And to make, to put fuel on the fire, when the night of the prom came I was still remembering this in the back of my head. I was always a klutz, and I was cracking nuts and I missed the nut and hit my wrist. Therefore I went to the final practice for the grand march with a big ace bandage on my wrist, trying to keep the swelling down. And I remember Mr. Pine was in charge, he was one of the Headmasters, and he was real

upset with me. He said to me, "I hope you're not going to have to wear that to the prom." And I said, "I hope I'm not going to have to wear it either." But that night, I had always had, as I say, these very little, diminutive dresses that my aunt would make. Very simple, very pretty, very sweet. And my mother and my aunt, and my cousin went to Boston and brought back a dress that was red chiffon, and it was off the shoulder, and it had ostrich feathers, and it was all very gathered in you know, I was probably much tinier in those days, and as I say my hair was very dark and again, I had my trademark, my gardenia. My aunt had let me borrow her full length blue wool evening coat with a leopard collar that she let me wear every time I went to a prom. And of course the red and the blue was beautiful and it was very close to being Valentine's Day. So that the red was outstanding, but I always assumed that you had to wear white, or powder blue, or pink and nothing quite as much of a dress that would look like Jezebel. That's all I could think about. I had seen the movie with Bette Davis, and all I could see was, oh, I'm going to be a Jezebel. I went to the prom and I proceeded to make a quick retreat to the downstairs ladies room in Memorial Auditorium. And I didn't know that they were screaming upstairs for me to come up and have my picture taken, that the Lowell Sun was there.

There was the Adjutant and his girl, his partner, and Dick Reynolds and myself, and Colonel Thompson was in charge of the regiment, and his wife. They kept calling for me, and calling for me, and I'm downstairs and they're looking for me upstairs. I would not take the coat off. I was so afraid that I was going to be laughed at. Instead of that, it was such a hit. It was... They said that when they put all the lights out in the auditorium and we came out of the door that it was just striking, the red. You know, it was so vibrant. And the next day there were people calling to remark on where had my mother bought the dress. Now I shall tell where my mother bought the dress. Filenes Basement. Where else! But it was funny, because they were, even coming home on the train that day, my cousin said to my mother, "If Anita doesn't like the dress, then I will buy it," because she was a little older than I was, but she was in love with the dress. But it's funny, thinking back on all the gowns I had over the years for college proms, and parties at the Electric Light and everything, the white taffeta, very diminutive, little, simple dress was my favorite. Possibly because it was my first.

S: But you still had that in back of your mind what the girl had said (A: yes), and therefore you didn't want to come out in that red dress.

A: That's right and I thought, they're all going to appear, the so called Debbies, the debutantes, as we used to call them, not too happily, you know. And still some of my best friends were these same girls. And I have no idea who it was that said it, but whether they knew I was there and said it is another question. Maybe it was completely just an innocent conversation and I just happened to be in the wrong place at the right time.

S: Do you know of any others that had problems like that because they didn't come from the right part of the city, they were looked down upon?

A: Oh I can remember an incident when I was in parochial school of a family, very large family, and as I say, it was, it was...you weren't...you were the majority, because everybody was up against tough times. If you were, you know, if your father had a steady job and he was bringing home a steady pay and like...like my husband was lucky enough, his father was a butcher. So he was very fortunate that he knew, you know, he always had a very, very good income, but we

didn't. You know, we sort of guessing games until the W.P.A. came along. And then my father went to work for the city as a blacksmith, and then we were living really high on the hog those days. Then as I mentioned I had gone to work. But I can remember an incident in school, in this school. Every nun, I will say this in all sincerity, it was a time where a lot of girls were forced into religious life, and boys also. And I remember one time at a mission in church the priest saying, "God forbid any parent force a child into religious life if it's not their vocation because it can be hell." But that was the way of the world. I mean sometimes there would be a nun and a priest, or sometimes it would be one, sometimes it would be multiple, you know, three or four. But in those days I can remember this one incident and this girl. I don't recall what she did, but I can recall the sister taking this very large green metal waste basket out from under her desk, which was a big, oak, kneehole desk with a solid front so you couldn't see anything, her feet or the basket, or anything, and making that girl get in to that cubby hole and stay there.

S: For punishment?

A: For punishment

S: You don't know what she had done wrong?

A: No. I'm sure, knowing the temperament of the nun, and other things that you know, she'd...somebody would come along, a particular family, if she didn't happen to like the, she'd keep them back. I mean it was...

S: Oh, you think because this girl came from a large family?

A: I don't, I really don't know. I mean she didn't always come to school, you know, with the fancy clothes or the cleanest, or whatever and ironically, she turned out to be extremely well-to-do and an absolutely striking woman. I haven't seen her in (--)

S: So you think that the nun, the teachers would discriminate against children that were not well dressed?

A: Yes. Yes. Definitely. I can't speak for now, but I can't speak for what happened in high school, but I know with the nuns they would be just as pleased if you came in with something new. I can remember my aunt, one of my aunts giving me an imported batiste blouse that was all embroidered and a [unclear] vest. And another aunt had made me one of her special skirts and we were having some kind of a special program at school and I was allowed to wear, usually if I had something new I had to wear it to church, as if the priests were going to bless my clothes, and if it rained, you didn't wear it, regard less of what it was, we didn't wear it. You wore your old shoes, you didn't wear new shoes. But this particular day I wore it or some reason, whether it was to have my picture taken in school or what. And I was sent to all sixteen classes in that school to show each nun what I had on. (S: Is that so?) And that was not uncommon. I mean if you came in with a particularly pretty dress...one girl who was in my class had extremely beautiful hand knit outfits. It would be a skirt and a jacket trimmed with angora and a beret to match. She had every color in the rainbow. Gorgeous, absolutely exquisite. The pleats were knitted into the skirts. Well all she had to do was wear one of those to school and she got sent on

the rounds. My mother had a knack for ironing. And I can remember wearing a dress to school one day. Of course we didn't...The rich...it was strange in those days, the wealthier children wore uniforms. They wore blue serge, wool serge uniforms with what I used to call celluloid collars. They were round collars and big bows and they just kind of hung on a belt. It was funny, you'd think it would be the other way around.

S: Why was it so?

A: Well, they could afford to buy uniforms.

S: I see.

A: But you'd think it would be the other way around, that the poor kids would have to wear the same thing every day, but we didn't. Although I can remember having a red skirt and a red sweater, and a blue skirt and a blue sweater, and a brown skirt and a, like a rust colored sweater. You'd wear one one day and one the next and one the next.

S: And were the kids with the uniforms treated better than the other kids?

A: I'd say so, yes. I mean...and of course you got into piano lessons. Well we had a piano, but I never took piano lessons. And finally when the W.P.A. came in you were allowed to go take free lessons. And I went for about four lessons and the teacher told me I was wasting my time and his. So I didn't go anymore. But back to the ironing. I went to school one day with a dress on. I didn't realize, they had a cute way of doing it. They would give you a note. And I found out later what the note...I probably opened the note and read it, I don't know, but I was inclined to do such things. But anyway, they wanted to figure out how my mother could iron puff sleeves and not put a crease in them. Now some people crease them across the middle. Some people crease them up and down two or three times? She could iron a sleeve and didn't even have an electric iron, had you know, the one you put on the stove and heat it.

S: How did that work?

A: I don't...Well you'd stick it on the stove and get it hot and mother would wet her finger and hit the iron and if it sizzled it was hot enough to iron with.

S: And how long did it last? Did you have to keep changing the iron?

A: Oh yes. I think possibly there were like two. There was like a frame, you know, but my mother was...ironing was a hobby with her. You know, changing the curtains, little sash curtains. And she'd lay them down and then fold them back, and fold them over, and fold them back, and then when they were put up on the little rods they were pleated. And they used to, people tell me now, when they'd go by...

**Tape II, side A ends**  
**Tape II, side B Begins**

S: ...and what the neighborhood was like here?

A: This house here? Well I bought this house that I'm sitting in right now without ever having seen it, never having been in it. Again, it reverts back to the Electric Light. I met a man that I had worked for, after the woman that I went to work for originally. She was forced to retire because they put in sixty-five compulsory retirement. So she was one of the first to go. So I only had her as a boss for eleven months, and then I got this nice young married man with two little girls, and he became my boss. And we got along famously. And then I was transferred into the managers office and I left him. Well years later I met him downtown one day. Now we were being evicted from the house in Billerica and wanted us to buy it, it was a carriage shed. We had bought land in Chelmsford, intending to build. I had been told I was never going to have any children. And after an operation that came very unexpectedly I got pregnant. Well everything came at once. So we didn't have time to build. So we thought, well, we'll buy a house and then rent it later on, or sell it and build in Chelmsford. I met my ex-boss and he said, "Would you be interested in, too bad I didn't know about it a week ago, I had a house right up near mine, similar, that was rented last week." He said, "But on the other hand, why don't you come up and take a look at it." So I went up and I saw his house that had you know, white paint and hardwood floors, all highly polished, and china closet, and just a darling little house. And so I said, "Oh, this is, I love it! Oh, it's adorable." Fell in love with it, and we talked about. Out of the clear blues sky he said to me, "Would you like to buy it, the house down the street," which meant having to evict someone. And it turned out we evicted the people who had lived there eighteen years, and let the people who had only moved in a week before, because one tenement was eight dollars a week and the other was only five. The five was five because they did not want any repairs done. The other people had steam heat. This side that we ended up living in had a one pipe furnace, a coal bin, you know, we had to shovel the coal into it and the whole thing. But anyway, we bought the house. We saw it in July, bought it in August. I became very ill in August, the latter part of August. I had to stay at my mothers house. Had the baby in October. My husband went back to Billerica and moved all our things. The people moved out the first day of December, out the front door, and my husband and his friends moved in the back door, and I came up that night. Now we had owned it since the twenty-second of August. I came up the night of December the first, walked in the house and immediately sat on the floor and cried. It was horrendous! Awful, ugly, you name it, nothing would explain how bad it was. It was all dark woodwork, real dark floors. They had chem-toned salmon colored chem-tone the living room, the dining room and the upstairs hall. There were decal swans and windmills, and anything that you could possibly think you didn't want was here.

S: This is it?

A: This is it.

S: Duplex house?

A: The duplex house. These houses were built. There were four of them originally. (S: Umhm. Tell me about that) They were built by the American Woolen Company. And the people who lived in these houses were the millwright, the head, like head engineers. You had to have a very

special job to live here. And even after we bought this house and the American Woolen had been long gone, it was now the A&P Corrugated Box Company in back. The mill is still there. It's now JoAnn Fabrics, textiles and fabrics something, or Compo, I guess it's called now. But anyway, one of the men still was in his eighties and still went back and forth and did his little bit. I think they just sort of kept him on the payroll. And then the large house that was in back, which was now been torn down, and there's an apartment house there, that was where the superintendent lived, with a big, beautiful barn where he kept his horses and everything.

S: The superintendent of where?

A: Of the American Woolen Company. (S: I see) That's where he lived.

S: I see.

A: And that eventually was made into a two-family house and then it became a dormitory. Half of it was a dormitory for girls from the University of Lowell. And then the house was sold. And then it sort of turned over. And then it eventually was torn down and these apartments were put in there.

S: Was this out in the country then?

A: This was very much. This, between...these four houses...these...it's funny, because people used to call these the barracks. There were four houses, they were all brown, two of them had sidewalks in front. The one that Mr. Vivers owned and ours that we bought. The other two didn't. Two of the houses had blinds and they were a little bit different in that regard, but they were all brown. And I used to get incensed when anyone would say to me, you live in one of those barracks? Well I don't think anybody even knew what a barracks was until World War II, you know, but anyway. It's funny, my mother was telling a friend of hers how I had bought this house. And she said, "Oh," she said, "That is adorable." It has such this, that, and charm, blah, blah, and we were wondering how she knew it, but she had come here to visit someone. The houses are deceiving, because when you look at the house, it looks as though you would walk into a square room, but when you come in, you come in on this side of the porch, naturally as you know, into a little hallway, and then you've got the twenty-five foot living room. The house is very well planned. And when we had the VA come about the loan, they explained to us that the house was built in nineteen-seventeen, and we were buying it in nineteen forty-nine. That the house had a potential of seventy-five more years. Well we didn't plan that we were going to be here for seventy-five more years, but we've been here for thirty-six. But across the street there wasn't any Karen Street, off Dingwell. There was absolutely no houses on Dingwell Street. That was just a field. There was one house at the corner of Dingwell and Middlesex Street. There were three houses between there and the market, which there was, you know, certainly no supermarkets. There was...the only thing commercial up here at that time was Eddie Gaudette's Riding Academy. It was opposite Hadley Field, and an icecream stand, and then a little house that the man used to sell, which was where the city dump was. The city dump was behind the little red house that they tore down to put in that new industrial park down there. The man was like a watchman, and he used to watch it, and he used to sell corn and stuff out in front, he and his wife. There was nothing, and there was a little variety store opposite Middlesex

Village School. There was nothing and when St. Hilaire wanted to put in a filling station I was PTA President at the time, and we did every thing we could to stop it, because children had to walk by there and we were afraid of cars whipping in and out. And at those times children went to school and went home to lunch, and went back, and then got out at 3 o'clock. So we had them coming and going. And the mills would get out at 3 o'clock and you had a steady stream of cars, up and down here, and the children had to walk on the road, but from Dingwell Street out...

S: There were no sidewalks?

A: There were no sidewalks

S: Was the street hot topped?

A: Yes, yes

S: Or cobblestoned?

A: No, no, it was hot topped, [unclear], whatever they called it. From [Viver's] house was the last of these four of the mill houses. Then you had [Hepburn's] house, and then there was a Mr. Sousa that had a big, big expansive farm land. And it, it's strange how things come full circle. When I was a child I used to go to these bazaars and penny sales, and all these things at the Portuguese church. Whenever the number their name would come out to win a prize, and it would say 1900 and some odd number Middlesex Street. My mother and I would look at each other. [Unclear] We would look at each other and say, "Where is that?" Because we lived at 623 Central Street. which was you know a long way from Middlesex, I mean from Middlesex Street up to there. So we're thinking, "Where could 1900 be?" And little did I realize that I'd end up living at 1875, which was three houses from this man's place.

S: And you're close to North Chelmsford, right here?

A: Right. If I stand...well it used to be, it isn't that way now, because the trees and everything have grown, but I used to be able to stand in front of the house and look up and see the Dusobox Company. It was the Imperial Upholstery. There was a lot of industry up there in those mills.

S: Umhm

A: There was the Imperial Upholstery, Dusobox, and I'm sure there were other smaller company's, but there was...from the mill there was a big, a Greek family had a big big house, and then Sousas and then Hepburns, and that was it to the city line.

S: Umhm. So it was really country out here.

A: It was country! (S: Umhm) My father's car got hit in front of our house one night, and he thought, by this time we had television, and he thought the sirens were on the T.V. And he was making himself a sandwich in the kitchen. And when he came in, the sirens and the lights were in front of our house. His car had been pushed from in front of our house to up in front of 1892.

There wasn't any wall, there was nothing. It was just pushed up. There were no houses over there at all.

S: Tell me, you said when you came here there was coal. Did you have central heating here?

A: One pipe furnace. Tthere was a... inbetween the living room and dining room there was a big metal grate.

S: All right. (A: And the heat came up) Explain, explain how the coal was delivered.

A: There was a shoot, it would shoot...

S: It would come by truck truck?

A: Truck, and carried in in bags, canvas bags on their shoulders.

S: Umhm

A: And poured down the shoot. And the coal bin was at the back window, at the back of the cellar.

S: Umhm

A: And ah... when Bill went off in a hurricane to work (S: umhm) which he did, and I would be here with ah... Bobby was only like three the first time we had a hurricane that was of any big consequence that I remember. Um, I used to have to, I couldn't start the furnace, because I didn't know how to do it. You'd have to put in like kindling, and coke. And once you got it going...the thing is once it went out it had to be cleaned out and restarted, you know?

S: Umhm

A: So I used to... and I didn't drive. So I would have to take the bus (S: Umhm) to North Chelmsford. And we use to go to the Paramount Lounge for the 99 cent meal, and that would be our one big meal for the day. And then we had peanut butter sandwiches for dinner. And then when Bill came home at night I'd sit with a candle and hold it while he'd shave you know. That's why I was so incensed over this last hurricane. The abuse that linemen took.

S: Hm

A: I mean we, we have always had you know, electric stove, electric refrigerator. Now we have electric heat. We've gone from a one pipe furnace to a gas furnace, and then we had a chance to put in...electric heat was coming in to use then. And they gave us a real nice deal whereby they would insulate the whole house. And it, for us it has worked out beautifully. At the time everybody thought it was, you know, not going work.

S: But your husband worked for G.E., right?



A: Mass. Electric

S: Oh Mass. Electric.

A: Mass Electric. That's how I met him. I met him when I used to come out to go for coffee break, and he was working outside, and he saw me and I didn't see him. And first time I was in charge of the party that the Electric Light gave all the returning Veterans, as well as all the new Veterans.

S: Oh all right, tell me about this. Your husband Bill was a veteran?

A: He was in the service 4 1/2 years.

S: World War II?

A: II, he was with the Coast Guard. And he came back, he got out like in March and he was hired on 4th of July. A silly day to start, but that's the day they were hired.

S: Umhm

A: And ah... a group of them were hired

S: Umhm.

A: And it worked out when they decided that whenever it would come to getting a promotion that they would draw cards, because they were all hired at the same day, the same hour, the same thing, which made it very difficult. Because sometimes they'd say like, you were hired at 8:02, therefore you have seniority, your were hired at 8:04. The man with 8:02 gets seniority. But in this particular incident, incident, all the men that were hired at the same time.

S: All right. You said you met Bill that way. (A: Right) You worked at, for the same company then?

A: Right, right, he came in...it's ironic. The man who I keep going back to, who had interviewed me, hired me, and had given me promotions through the years, I became, did all the stenographic work and we became very good friends. And when I was, I had another boyfriend, the same boy from high school, and I was in charge of Veteran's Party. So anyways this particular night we had it at Marty's for Parties, his famous turkey pie, and, I had the responsible for paying all the food. And this young, very nice looking, tall blonde, young man came over and asked me to dance. And I said, "I'm very sorry I had to go in, I had an appointment to meet Mr. O'Connor." I was being very polite. Normally he was Marty, but anyway, Mr. O'Connor I went to pay the bill." Fine. When I came out, after I payed the bill, my friend was still standing there waiting. So what was I to do but to dance with him. Well in those days they played 3 Waltz, 3 Foxtrots, 3 whatever and you didn't have to take the chance in, "Oh, I can't do the Mambo, or I can't do the Cha-Cha, or I can't do this. You knew you were going to have Waltz.

S: Umhm.

A: The music stop, and I stop, and I didn't know this man, boy from Adam. And his first remark was, "I'm going to marry you."

S: Oh, he knew immediately.

A: And I said to him...well see he had been seeing me going in and out of the office. I said, "You are a Linemen with the line." Actually he was just a groundmen then, because you had to go up through all the different steps (S: umhm) and phases. So he said, "Well I'm telling you I'm gonna marry you within two years." Well he went home that night and his aunt asked him...his mother had died while he was in the service, and his aunt was taking care of him, "Did you have a nice time Bill?" He said, "Oh I had a wonderful time Aunt Sarah, I met the girl I'm going to marry. And she said, "Oh Bill, you've had a million girlfriends." He was 24 at that time, and I was 21. (S: Umhm)

A: So he said, "I'm telling you I'm going to..." So I married him a year later. I went with the two boys until I really got to know Bill better, and it just, it worked out fine. The other boy married a very lovely girl, and a lovely family. And I married. But my boss had said to me one day, he saw me with the other boy one morning, and he said to me, "Why are you wasting your time," just kidding, being very you know, facisious. And I smiled and I said, "Why. Why am I wasting my time? I've been going with him since I was in high school." He said, "I know." He said, but he said, "You're going to meet some big blonde fellow comes along, and you're not going to care wether he digs ditches, or works in Boott Mill, or you're not going tocare, you're going to marry him." It was almost as though he foresaw what was going to happen, He hired Bill.

S: Wonderful!

A: And then when he found out I was you know, marrying this same boy, and I don't think he ever realized what he had said to me. So the day that I was leaving to have my first baby, I didn't want to go say good-bye to him, and he didn't want to come say good-bye to me. So I sat at my desk, and he always left early on Friday. I want to say early, like 20 minutes early, and it was now 20 minutes after. So it's now twenty past five, and I've got to get out and get my ride to Billerica. And he came out and he said to me, "You know Anita, he said I would give anything I have to be in the position your in." And I said, "Why?" Because I thought this man had a beautiful home, you know, money and prestige, and he had a very nice life hunting and fishing and all that stuff. And he said, "Because I never had any children." And he said, You're leaving." So after that I use to bring, when Bobby was born I use to bring him in, and then he died before I ever had jeans on him.

S: So you had three children?

A: I have had children.

S: What are they doing?

A: Robert is a sales representative for Crown Caulk and Seal., bottling, they sell bottling equipment.

S: Umhm

A: And cans, he's [unclear] cans for Gillete and all these large companyies. Jean went to, he went to St. Francis College in Biddeford Maine, after going to St. Joseph's School here in Lowell (S: Umhm), which is now in the past as far as his Brothers are concerned. (S: Umhm) Jean went to, they all went to public grade school

S: Umhm

A: And Jean went to the Sisters of Mercy. Went to Castle Junior College. got an Associate Degree and went to work for Wang. And she's now, she's retired at the moment, with her two children. They're ages five and three. And my youngest boy, Jean is 29, Bobby's 36, John is 23, he is a State Trooper in New Hampshire. He didn't finish the University of Lowell. He had a chance to go to the Police Academy. He had been a cop in Hudson, as well as a full-time student University of Lowell Law and Justice. In the middle of his junio year he had a chance to go to the Academy, so he took it. And from that, evolved that he was chosen to go to the police academy. And so he has finished his first year as a trainee, and now he's a full fledge trooper.

S: So you have a nice family.

A: Well we have four grandchildren, yah.

S: And now that Bill has retired, (A: Retired) it sounds as though you have an ideal life.

A: Right. He worked 38 years for the company, retired a year ago. He worked his way up, and finally went into management and did extremely well. (S: Umhm) And both Jean and Bobby worked summer for Mass. Electric. So I think we've done...

S: That company has really stood by as a family?

A: Yes it's funny, because they used to tell our story. They are many many couples that have met and married. I mean it's very, very common in all the companies. But ah, they used to tell the story about, the Cinderalla story, you know. (S: Umhm) But I enjoyed it. I worked there six years and I thoroughly, thoroughly enjoyed it. I grew up a lot. I went in seventeen years old, and I, did, did things I wish I could take back, you know, ah, again my brain being outside my mouth. But um, I wouldn't of want to have changed a day of it, really you know you look back and, I'm looking back now and yesterday was my birthday 60.

S: Ah congratulations!

A: Thank you, the big 60. (S: Ah wonderful!) Ah, it's been, it's been kind of traumatic for me, because my, my father died, almost moments, instantaneously at age 59. So when I had reached age 59 I became a little bit paranoid where I've had a heart attack five years ago. So I have reached 60 and I'm thrilled. And now I'm looking forward to reaching 84, because my mother lived to be 84.

S: Oh wonderful.

A: So, I'm looking forward, going to Ireland in May and I'm looking forward to it.

S: And you'll be living in this home when your 84?

A: I hope so. I think so. I mean considering what we paid for it at the time, and what the valuation would be, the value of it now. Ah, well as an example, the houses were sold at public auction. And this house that we bought was sold to Mr. [Vivers] for seven hundred dollars, which...

S: What year was that?

A: That I...itt would be in the 30's. It had to be.

S: All right.

A: because ah...

S: That was before the war?

A: Yes

S: Umhm.

A: I would have, I would assume.

S: Umhm

A: Because ah, I mean Vic spoke about you know, his children the teachers they had and all that. So just, just on, as a guess, I would say that they probably came up here as a newly married couple.

S: Umhm

A: You know, and the house, he bought two of them at the public auction. They just stood out front and then they bid, that was it. The house that is still here, the fourth, which was originally the fourth is now the third house, sold for a thousand dollars because that had a garage. Now the last time that house was sold. I think it was up in the 80s, 80 thousand, in that general vicinity. So it just goes to show how... but the houses were extremely well built.

S: Umhm

A: And I've never had anybody come into the house that hasn't said, you know, ah, even the way the porches were made. So that when they, when the sun is low, is it the winter that it's low, or the summer, [unclear] Bill, my husband would know that type of thing, but it's made (S: hum) so that it shades (S: Umhm) when it's really hot. And then in the summer, I mean in the summer, and in the winter we need it to be, to get that heat, almost like solar energy, because it is, its extremely... well living in these houses, we had never had heat upstairs. And now that we have the electric heat, all our thermostats are turned off with exception of the bathroom, because you get out of the shower you'd naturally want to have some heat. But our children never liked hot bedrooms to sleep in anyway. So the thermostat...one night we had guests, and John had to give up his room. So he immediately took a piece of scotch tape and put a sign over the thermostat saying (laughs) "please do not turn on the heat." And they thought it was hysterical. I was ready to kill him, but that's neither here nor there, you know. But I look back and think ah... Bill and I have certainly have done better than our parents did. My parents didn't own a house. Bill's mother and father, they didn't...Well I think if my father wanted to buy one when things began, you know get, really get good for them, but, my mother wasn't interested. And she was always afraid that there was going to be another depression. And she never had a charge card. Never bought any thing on time. Everything...if the money wasn't there it wasn't bought, that was it, car whatever.

S: Do you use charge cards?

A: [Laughs] Oh! I have and answer for that. I, yes I do. Not, not, not, you know, exclusively, no, but um, if I, if there's something I want, like say ah, I want to go on a trip or something I would use it.

S: So you have changed from what your mother use to do?

A: Oh, oh definitely! And it was mother's theory. I wanted to buy a bedroom set, I might go down to household and buy it and pay for it in 90 days. So it would be a cash deal. But my mother would say, "Oh Anita, how can you take that on your shoulders?" And I'd say, "But mother, I mean I'm not, if I wait..." Like my father and my mother waited to do this, do that, they never had the opportunity. (S: Hm) He died, five minutes he was dead. (S: Hm) No warning, no nothing and she lived for all those years alone. So that I would rather had it now, and take my chances later. I'd go out and buy the bedroom set and it took 90 days or whatever or...it was paid for. If I made it 30 days, whatever, but the thing is... And she said to me later on, "You had the right idea Anita." She said, "I was wrong." She said, "I did without all those years. And then she could never break that little world that she had. It was like she was in a little cocoon.

S: Hm.

A: It Ah...

S: Did she...did she think of herself as being Irish or being American? What do you think she thought of herself as being?

A: I think my mother thought of herself as being Irish. And it's funny...

S: And she was born here.

A: She was born here, but her... Well her both parents were from Ireland and spoke with brogues. (S: Umhm) My mother pick up their way of speaking.

S: Umhm

A: So that in turn I picked it up.

S: Umhm.

A: And I can remember going into the office one day and saying, "Oh, my father had an accident, he put a dint [dent] in the car." And Mr. Viver said to me, "Anita when did you get off the boat?" And I looked at him in amazement and said, "What do you mean?" He said "Dint [dent]", he dinted the fender." And I didn't know, I still didn't know what he meant. He said, "You mean dent." But my mother said dint, because her mother (S: Right) had said dint.

S: Of course

A: And it took me the longest time. And any time I would go to use that word, I would stop and sort of take a deep breath and then say it. But I realized my mother never said the word bus. She said buzz.

S: Ah

A: See my grandmother was used to my grandfather being a conductor on electric cars.

S: Umhm

A: And when the buzzes came in it...

S: Do you remember the electric cars?

A: Yes, hm.

S: What were they like?

A: There were similar to ah... well the only way I can describe the one's I remember was similar to a bus, but it didn't have, it didn't have you know, it didn't have a wheel. It didn't have wheels. It ran on a track, and it had (hesitates) like an aerial that went up on ah...and it ran, and it was like little sparks used to come out of it, and dah...

S: That aerial, did that hit a wire up above?

A: Yah, right, hm.

S: Is that when the sparks came out?

A: Right. So naturally in those days you didn't have the bus route, I mean you didn't have the electric car routes that you had like for the, when the buses came in, because then they could go any place. The electric car could only go on this paraphernalia that it ran on.

S: Do you remember where they went?

A: I can remember on Lawrence Street, running up Lawrence Street. As a matter of fact I know a young boy who went down Ames Street on a sled, and went under the electric car and had his leg amputated.

S: Ooh.

A: I always wondered why he walked differently then than the rest of us did. And he was much older than I was. And I asked my mother and she told me.

S: Was he treated differently because he was (A: No) disabled?

A: No. No. I can remember, you know ah, people. You really, of course in those days, this is a sad thing to say, but you didn't see that many handicap people out. In other words...

S: They kept them hidden...

A: Inside

S: They were hidden?

A: Absolutely, absolutely. If ah... I can remember a house I used to visit and I probably, there's a siren coming, I probably had gone to that house for months months, or a year, before all of a sudden one day I see this one lady there and she was on a crutch. And it wasn't a crutch as we know it now. You know, it was like the V. It was just, it was up in back of the arm, and it was a single piece, like the very ah...what's the word I'm trying to use, primitive type crutch. (S: umhm). ...

S: Homemade type?

A: Could be. It could have been.

S: Umhm.

A: You know, someone could have carved it. But ah,. you didn't...They used to... I can remember one man who lived on Mill Street, and I can remember him... Hosford Square was covered with big elm trees. (S: Umhm) And I can remember him being pushed up in, and they would sit under the elm trees, and they'd play cards. And ... and he would sit there in his wheel chair. But you didn't see like people who were...what's the word I'm trying to think of, retarded. There weren't... I can remember the first time I went with a neighbor of mine to a house, they owned quite a bit of property and they owned the house I lived in. And they took me to a house and there was a retarded girl, and I have never seen anybody that was retarded.

S: But she was never let out of the house then?

A: No. Ah, if she, maybe if someone was with her, but I don't... I mean she didn't go to school.

S: Oh, they didn't go to school then?

A: No, no. There were no special schools for people in those days. There was no special classes. There was no one like in school with you that was retarded.

S: Were there many, that type in the Irish community that you knew of, you know, that you knew that they had a child that some of them had water in the heads in those days. You know, they had large heads.

A: Yah, yah.

S: And they were, you were aware that they were in the house, they didn't come out.

A: Right. I don't, off hand I can't...

S: You don't remember in the Irish community being that way?

A: I can't remember any. Of course for some reason schizophrenia is very common in Irish people.

S: Are they? Is it?

A: Yes, ah ... for what reason I don't know. And ah, there again people just did not talk about it. Ah .....

S: But some how you were aware that .....

A: Right, one of my mother's sisters had...well had...it was never...it was never said. It was never, there was never a medical term put to it.

S: Umhm

A: But it was ah, "that she wasn't well," that was the expression.



S: Oh

A: And ah... she, the father died and she was extremely close to her father. She work in a shoe shop. And that was sort of the beginning of it.

S: Oh

A: And she was always the one that if my mother came in late from the dance...one night she was supposed to be home at 10 o'clock, and they didn't leave at intermission. She got home at five past ten. Therefore her oldest sister told on her. So she wasn't aloud to go to the dance for six months.

S: Oh.

A: Extreme, my father was very strict. And so there was this very close relationship between the oldest girl and the father. Well when he died she began to get a little bit um...withdrawn. It's the only way I can describe it. Then um, it sometimes manifest itself in a religious...

**Interview ends**

**JW**